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APR 21 3 03 PM '97

JAMES N. QUELLO

96-45

April 2, 1997

SUNSHINE PERIOD

The Honorable James Quello, Commissioner
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M St. NW, Room 802
Washington, D.C., 20054

Dear Commissioner Quello,

As public school teachers, we write in support of meaningful discounts on telecommunications services for schools and libraries so that every school child and life-long learner can have access to the world of information technology. The Telecommunications Act--through its Universal Service Fund provisions--mandates the development of special discount rates for all schools and libraries so that they can secure services at affordable prices.

Educators know that advanced telecommunications services are important to improving learning, sparking the imagination and leveling the playing field for all of our nation's children. Affordable access to technology in all classrooms and libraries will assure that our children and life-long learners can connect with the technology they would need to compete in today's and tomorrow's workforce. Advanced telecommunications services in the classroom will also create informed and skilled consumers of new technology well into the 21st century.

Last November, the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service sent to the FCC a set of recommendations for implementing the Universal Service Fund provisions related to schools and libraries. These recommendations would give our learning institutions significant discounts on all services that are commercially available, with deeper discounts for those schools and libraries least able to pay and more expensive to service. All schools would get discounts on connections to classrooms and Internet connectivity, both of which are essential to providing the most advanced learning opportunities to the greatest number of students.

We urge your support for the Joint Board's recommendations. Taken as a whole, they will provide affordable discounts for a full range of services, and give schools and libraries flexibility in choosing the services needed to meet each community's diverse needs. Most importantly, these provisions, if adopted by the FCC, will make advanced technology for learning available to all Americans.

Thank You,

Undersigned Faculty and Staff Members

Boulton EL.

(Name of school)

Davis County School District, Utah

Cindy Read-Smith
Kelly L. Sanders

Celeste C. Waples

Wendy Rice

Mary Ann Garner

Michelle Haglund

Cathy Anderson

Beverly Grant

Nelda Lehman

LyAnn Bryson

Elaine Hawkins

Cindy Khamedovost

Kate Ninton-Smith

Marion Bonner

Paula P. Winter

Bob Chamberlain

Phyllis Miller

Annelle Lotz

Kamelle Fulsom

R. Westenskow

Coyla Eden

LaRee Mitchell

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MAY 6 1997

Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

JAMES H. QUELLO

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Federal Communications Commission
1919 M St. NW, Room 802
Washington, D.C., 20054

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Thank You,

Undersigned Faculty and Staff Members

Holt Elementary
(Name of school)

Davis County School District, Utah

Ruth Thorne	Wendy
Carolyn Marston	Jackie Taylor
Jeri Rigley	Lynette Level
Brenda	Kristal Mills
Samara Sweet	Susan E. Weiler
Anella Dent	Norathy Rigley
Sandra Jorgensen	Cheryl Bryner
Jennifer Votava	Dorothy Little
Marilyn Hamblin	Sandra Hodgson
Linda Hall	Lusan Colledge
Sandra Hahn	Dulann Owens
Sue Shumway	Jeanne Leach

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Liberty High School
5855 Bartholow Rd.
Eldersburg, MD 21784-8499

Dr. Robert L. Bastress
Principal

The Honorable Reed E. Hundt, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20554

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MAY 6 1997

Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

MAY 14 22 PM '97

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OFFICE OF
COMMISSIONER
SUSAN H. HARRIS

RE: CC Docket No.96-45

Dear Chairman Hundt:

As members of the faculty and staff of Liberty High School, Carroll County, Maryland, we wish to express our support for the Universal Service discounts for libraries and schools which have been recommended by the Joint Board.

It is important that libraries and schools have affordable access to the Internet so that everyone has the opportunity to travel the Information Highway. The Telecommunications Act will ensure that all schools, no matter how poor, will be able to connect. The plan will bring services directly to the classroom where students can learn how and where to access information while under the guidance of an informed adult.

At Liberty High School our students have access to the Internet from the Media Center, the writing lab, and data processing lab. However, as our school population is growing rapidly it is important that the opportunities for access continue to expand.

We urge the FCC to fully support the Joint Board's discount plan for universal service for schools and libraries.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Bastress, Principal
John H. Magee
Theresa Allen - Assistant Principal
GRM Adams, Assistant Principal
Marta Carol Meyers
Sandra Sunderland
Henry Adams

Alice M. Carickner
Ruth Ann Brown
Immailey
Beggy Kelly Johnson
Mary Johnson
Jusan Brubaker
Flora Zedfill

WE SUPPORT THE ATTACHED LETTER

Virginia J. Phelan	Jean Smydale
John DeLine	Mona H. Shaw
BEUCE L. RAMASIO	Juan Smith
Miriam J. Thornton	Peter Zunge
Jim Langlois	Cheryl Bobbitt
ad Williams	Ernest Combs
MD	V. C. Hall
Cathy Doney	Robert L. Greenwood Jr.
Martha C. Speck	Jim Dulin
Helen Derrin	Marilyn Agins
Therese Greene	Jane Hee O'Keefe
Elaine M. Bowers	Donald C. Koper
Theresa H. Schaefer	Amelia Fyfe
DPH/Ka	David Fyfe
Michelle Singer	Maranda Hudson
Christopher L. Hesk	Joy A. San
Jan Furman	Maribeth Weiss
Margaret Kelso	Nancy Farver
Susan Demski	Peggy McCullin
Delma Shicker	Kate Allen
Richard Duwall	Brianne Hall
Wendy	Don B. Roth
Marilyn Bradack	Nancy Eisenbach
Joseph K. Reitz	Wynne Bieda
Brenda A. Alexander	Theresa H. Schaefer
Mac Schaffer	Douglas J. Agins
Carol Fyfe	Brother C. Kelley
Al. Donohue	Nora Murray
Ralph J. Channing	Robert E. Jindulac
John Fyfe	Donna S. Jones
Bonnie J. Boyle	William E. Fyfe



Dr. Samuel Mudd Elementary School



820 Stone Avenue
Waldorf, Md. 20602
Dr. Colleen Seremet, Principal

96-45
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SUNSHINE PERIOD

FAX COVER SHEET

DATE:

April 25

TO: James Quello

FAX NUMBER:

202 418-2802

FROM: J. Evans

FAX NUMBER:

301 374-9581

Number of Pages Including Cover Sheet:

2

Message:



Doing What's Best For Children



Phone (301) 645-3686
Fax (301) 374-9581

April 22, 1997

SUNSHINE PERIOD

Commissioner James H. Quello
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street NW
Washington, DC 20554

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MAY 6 1997

RE: CC Docket No. 96-45

Dear Commissioner Quello:

WE are faculty and staff from Dr. Mudd Elementary in Maryland. We are writing in support of the Universal Service discounts for schools and libraries that have been recommended by the Joint Board.

We would like to thank you for your dedication in ensuring that all schools and libraries will have affordable access to the Information Superhighway.

The Telecommunications Act and the Joint Board discount plan will guarantee that even the poorest schools will have the opportunity to connect to the Internet and provide distance-learning opportunities. The \$2.25 billion a year will address the needs of all our schools, and, importantly, the plan will bring services directly to the classroom where students learn. Your inclusion of internal classroom connections for discount is vital. This plan is essential for preparing the workforce of tomorrow.

Our students need deep discounts for telecommunications services this year. We urge the FCC to fully support the Joint Board's discount plan for universal services for schools and libraries.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Susan Carlock
Janice M. Evans
Linda G. Chisley
Muriel T. Working
Janet M. Lutz
Carol Beck
Elizabeth Wick
Forre Gregory

Janet M. Lutz

SUNSHINE PERIOD



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RECEIVED
MAY 6 1997

Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

May 1, 1997

The Honorable James Quello, Commissioner
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, NW Suite 844
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Commissioner Quello

The American Hospital Association, on behalf of its 5,000 member hospitals and health systems urges you to fully implement the intent of health care access provisions of the federal Universal Support mechanism required by the Snowe-Rockefeller amendments of the Telecommunications Reform Act of 1996.

Eliminate Distance Charges

The law was written to ensure "rates comparable" for rural health care networks to those available to their urban counterparts. In our opinion, allowing continuation of distance-sensitive rates would violate the intent of the statute, making equal access to health care services via telecommunications virtually impossible in many rural areas. Please eliminate or offset the effect of distance-based charges so that valuable telehealth projects may be implemented equally for all Americans.

Internet Access

Increasingly, teaching and training, community health education, public health and other clinical health services are becoming available via multimedia desktop applications over the internet. At the same time, rural health care providers must pay significantly more for long distance and related charges to gain internet access. As you consider the range of modalities and technologies available to health care networks under the Universal Services provision, we urge that you allow rural providers to gain internet access at urban dial-up rates.

Washington, DC Center for Public Affairs
Chicago, Illinois Center for Health Care Leadership

Liberty Place, Suite 700
325 Seventh Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004-2802

Qualifying Institutions

Within telehealth networks, many of the reference or consulting institutions are actually located in urban areas-- though they are providing service to their rural counterparts. We urge that the final order consider the various hub and spoke and or multi-point networks which are emerging, recognizing that many of these largely rural networks include one or more academic health centers or other urban-based facilities. A link between a rural and urban facility should be deemed service to a rural area eligible for rate relief in the commission's final order.

On behalf of the nation's hospitals and health care systems, I want to thank you in advance for your hard work in implementing these worthwhile provisions, and offer our ongoing support on these and related matters. Let us know if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Bentley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Bentley".

James Bentley
Senior Vice President for Policy



SUNSHINE PERIOD

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MAY 6 1997

Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

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330 South 16th Place • Sturgeon Bay, WI 54235-1495 • 414-743-5566

MEMO

To: Commissioner Susan Ness
From: Gerald M. Worrick, Administrator
Subject: Universal Service Policy
Date: May 6, 1997

As I understand, on Wednesday, May 7 you will be voting on the Universal Service Policy, which is part of the implementation of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The universal service provisions will direct telecommunication rate subsidies to rural health care providers.

I strongly encourage the Commissioners to vote in favor of this provision. As a rural hospital administrator, it is very important that the physicians, nurses, and patients we serve have the same access to high-technology services as those living in the urban settings. It is through the technological developments in telecommunications that the whole concept of telemedicine will be available. This can only occur with our ability to access the large medical centers in the urban settings, which can only be achieved through low rates of access. The Universal Service Policy will provide and guarantee that ability to rural health care institutions, along with schools and libraries.

At this time we can only imagine the impact of telemedicine and the services it will be able to provide to us. This can only be achieved with low rates which will allow us to begin developing those types of systems.

Therefore, I again strongly encourage you to vote in favor of these sections of the Telecommunications Act.

GMW/kab

Page 2

Chairman Reed Hundt

Federal Communications Commission

May 6, 1997

Further, many telecommunications departments chargeback for long distance service within their own company. With the reduction in retail rates, the margin between what we pay and what we charge for long distance calls will shrink. This will further hurt budgets for the telecommunications departments within companies. This problem may appear to be a purely internal issue; however, these revenues are used to enhance and expand communications services within businesses by the telecommunications departments. Thus, innovative deployment of new technologies will be significantly dampened by reducing per minute long distance access charges.

At Ohio University the margin between bulk long distance rates and what we charge students pays for free local telephone service in the residence halls. Thus, regardless of the ability to pay, all residents at Ohio University have the safety feature and convenience of a working telephone when they arrive on campus. This program would be jeopardized by the reduction or elimination of per minute long distance access charges.

Lost revenue to business

Further, many large business and universities have "direct termination" arrangements in which the long distance companies pay the business to terminate long distance calls on the business' internal telephone network. The long distance companies save money, the businesses earn money.

At Ohio University the revenue from these direct termination arrangements has been critical in building our data network and in linking our remote Athens location via fiber to the major carriers.

Further, prior to these direct termination provisions, the Ohio University call volume routinely consumed all bandwidth available for placing calls to and from the region. Our bypass of the local exchange carrier to link directly to AT&T and MCI helped us and helped the region. Without this income stream, we would likely have to sever our high capacity ties to the outside world, paid for with these per minute long distance access fees. The impact on our academic programs would be considerable.

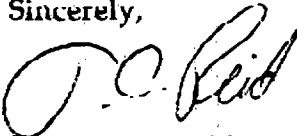
Page 3
Chairman Reed Hundt
Federal Communications Commission
May 6, 1997

Usage sensitive local exchange costs are real

Heavily used trunks and telephone lines do increase the cost of providing local service. Increased processor capacity, additional device boards such as tone receivers and more intensive traffic management add costs that are directly related to traffic volume. Thus, per minute based long distance access charges make sense from a cost accounting basis.

In conclusion, I urge the FCC to leave the existing long distance access fees in place while the true impact of modifications are explored in more depth.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Reid

Director, Communication Network Services
Adjunct Professor, College of Business
Former Member, State of Ohio Telecommunications Advisory Council

xc: FCC Commissioner James E. Quello
FCC Commissioner Rachelle B. Chong
FCC Commissioner Susan Ness
Attorney Brian Moir
Jeri Semer, Executive Director, ACUTA
U.S. Senator Mike Dewine
U.S. Senator John Glenn
Ohio Senator Nancy Chiles Dix
Ohio Senator James E. Carnes
Ohio Congressman Ted Strickland
Ohio State Representative Larry Householder
Alan Geiger, Ohio University President's Office
Paul Gandel, Provost, Ohio University

FAX TRANSMISSION

TREUTLEN COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

202 THIRD STREET
SOPERTON, GA 30457
(912) 529-4127
FAX: (912) 529-4229

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MAY 6 1997

SUNSHINE PERIOD

To: The Honorable James Quello,
Commissioner

Date: April 24, 1997

Fax #: 202-418-2802

Pages: 2, including this cover sheet.

From: Cherrie Smith

Subject: CC Docket No. 96-45

COMMENTS:

April 24, 1997

The Honorable James Quello, Commissioner
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, NW, Room 844
Washington, DC 20554

RE: CC Docket No. 96-45

Dear Commissioner Quello:

As the curriculum director for the Treutlen County school system, I am writing to express my gratitude for the actions you have taken to ensure that all school districts will have affordable access to the Information Superhighway.

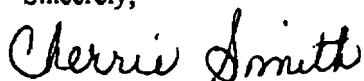
The Telecommunications Act and the Federal-State Joint Board decision will help to level the playing field for small, rural school systems like ours and ensure that all school districts will have the opportunity to connect to the Internet. It will also allow our school system to continue to provide distance-learning opportunities. It is important to bring these services directly to the classroom where students learn. Thus, your inclusion of internal classroom connections for discounts is crucial.

We currently have one dial-in connection to the Internet at two of our three schools. Needless to say, we cannot meet the needs of all our students with this limited access. These discounts would allow us to provide the wonderful resources available on the Information Superhighway to a greater numbers of students, a benefit magnified by our inaccessibility to more traditional resources that are available to schools in more populated parts of our state.

Our students need deep discounts for telecommunications services this year. I urge the FCC to fully support the Joint Board's discount plan for universal service for schools.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Cherrie Smith
Curriculum Director

96-45

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JAMES H. QUAYLE

MAY 6 1997

SUNSHINE PERIOD

April 2, 1997

The Honorable James Quello, Commissioner
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M St. NW, Room 802
Washington, D.C., 20054

Dear Commissioner Quello,

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Last November, the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service sent to the FCC a set of recommendations for implementing the Universal Service Fund provisions related to schools and libraries. These recommendations would give our learning institutions significant discounts on all services that are commercially available, with deeper discounts for those schools and libraries least able to pay and more expensive to service. All schools would get discounts on connections to classrooms and Internet connectivity, both of which are essential to providing the most advanced learning opportunities to the greatest number of students.

We urge your support for the Joint Board's recommendations. Taken as a whole, they will provide affordable discounts for a full range of services, and give schools and libraries flexibility in choosing the services needed to meet each community's diverse needs. Most importantly, these provisions, if adopted by the FCC, will make advanced technology for learning available to all Americans.

Thank You,

Undersigned Faculty and Staff Members

Davis High
(Name of school)

Davis County School District, Utah

Elayne Finckson

D.S. R.

Dacia Whitesides

Hall

J. Sutherland

Wendy Jensen

Jeffrey A. Hollett

Adelle K. Barnett

J. Michael Shaw

Shanda Stein

Joe D. Louchey

Mary King

Joan Hansen

Joan M. Harts

David R. Hensrud

Norm Sturgeon

Erin

Ally

Sufian Abu-Rmaileh

Kathleen Lorch

Cindy Flint

Marisa Hills

Ann Sommer

Joan Swartz

Amalali

Samuel Morgan School
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MAY 6 1997

JAMES H. QUELLO

96-45

April 2, 1997

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1919 M St. NW, Room 802
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Thank You,

Undersigned Faculty and Staff Members

Samuel Morgan Elementary
(Name of school)

Davis County School District, Utah

Scott W. Keel	Muriel Jung
Kathleen Bayley	Sandra W. Blamires
Kathy Nelson	Brenda Vernon
Sharon Paulson	Paula Nielson
Jon Little	Steve S. Sles
Andrea Lee	
Steph. Povey	Jennifer Jensen
Roxann A. Weathers	Prilla Jett
Jelen Hunsy	Ann C. Miller
Reckell Herbst	Kathy Som
Sally Cannon	Kay McCormick
Alison Campbell	Jana Moore
Caroline Lewis	Vickie Jensen



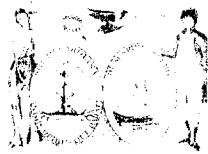
STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
State Budget and Control Board
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SUNSHINE PERIOD

DAVID M. BEASLEY, CHAIRMAN
GOVERNOR

RICHARD A. ECKSTROM
STATE TREASURER

EARLE E. MORRIS, JR.
COMPTROLLER GENERAL



P.O. BOX 12444
COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA 29211
(803) 734-2320

JOHN DRUMMOND
CHAIRMAN, SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

HENRY E. BROWN, JR.
CHAIRMAN, WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

LUTHER F. CARTER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

April 28, 1997

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MAY 6 1997

Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

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SECRETARY
APR 29 10 52 AM '97

The Honorable Susan Ness
Commissioner
Federal Communications Commission
Room 832
1919 M Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: Federal-State Joint Board Recommendations
on Universal Service (CC Docket No. 96-45)

Dear Commissioner Ness:

On behalf of the State of South Carolina, I would like to urge the Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") to implement promptly the general recommendations of the Federal-State Joint Board relating to universal service support for K-12 schools and for libraries. There are a few minor details of the Joint Board's recommendations for school/library support that should be modified to make the program administratively more manageable. Specifically, the rules should expressly recognize that state agencies may file consolidated requests for universal service support on behalf of their schools and libraries, and the Universal Fund Administrator should be instructed to accept such consolidated filings. (South Carolina and other states have been in contact with the FCC's staff on these and other matters.) Overall, however, the Joint Board's recommendations are critical to the success of the combined efforts of federal, state and local governments to ensure that all of our children have access to the basic telecommunications resources necessary for enhanced learning and interaction with the burgeoning worldwide electronic information storehouse.

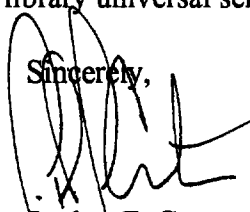
We in South Carolina have recognized for some time the tremendous importance of having our schools and libraries connected to the Internet. In 1996, at my behest, our legislature appropriated \$10 million to connect our K-12 schools and our libraries to the Internet. As of April 1, 1997, we had completed dedicated connections of approximately 620 schools and libraries. We expect to connect the remaining 697 schools and libraries by December, 1997.

But much more needs to be done in South Carolina and elsewhere. We need to train our teachers to bring the full potential of the Internet and other technologies into their classrooms. We need to acquire additional computers and related technology to ensure that our schools and libraries are adequately equipped to meet the needs of their respective student and user populations. We need to enhance the use of live video instruction capabilities (including interactive video conferencing) that have been pioneered by the South Carolina Educational Television System. And we need to ensure that every one of our students (especially those in the most disadvantaged school districts) has the maximum opportunity to use the educational tools made possible through computers and communications technology.

The school/library universal service proposals will go a long way toward helping us achieve our objectives. Although South Carolina already has committed to connect our schools and libraries to the Internet, the availability of universal service support will enable us to free up funds for the important related tasks listed above and many others that are essential to providing our children with a quality education.

We in South Carolina very much appreciate the support that you, the FCC, the Joint Board, Congress and the Administration have given to this endeavor. We urge the FCC to take the next step by promptly adopting rules that will implement the Joint Board's basic recommendations on school/library universal service support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. F. Carter', written over the typed name.

Luther F. Carter
Executive Director

cc: Barbara Nielsen
State Superintendent of Education

1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 403
Washington, DC 20004-1701
USA

Telephone 202 628 8421
Fax 202 628 8424
E-mail:oitp@alawash.org

Office for Information
Technology Policy

96-45

SUNSHINE PERIOD

ALA American Library Association

May 2, 1997

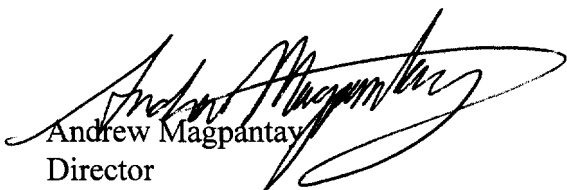
Commissioner Susan Ness
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Commissioner Ness,

On behalf of the Education and Library Networks Coalition, I wanted to bring the attached letter to the editor from today's USA Today to your attention.

Thank you for your continuing work on behalf of schools and libraries. If you have any questions which we can help with, please feel free to contact me at 202/628 8421.

Sincerely,



Andrew Magpantay
Director
Office for Information Technology Policy
American Library Association

Enclosure

CC:

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MAY 6 1997

Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

MAY 5 6 43 PM '97

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SECRETARY

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"USA TODAY hopes to serve as a forum for better understanding and unity to help make the USA truly one nation."

—Allen H. Neuharth
Founder, Sept. 15, 1982



David Mazzarella
Editor

Karen Jurgensen
Editor of the
Editorial Page

Thomas Curley
President and Publisher

LETTERS

Schools, libraries need discount online charges

Schools and public libraries can and should be critical links to the Internet for people of all ages. Only about a fifth of U.S. families now have Internet access at home. For those who can't afford computers and online charges, their school or public library is a natural access point.

Supported largely by tax dollars, libraries are the heart of our nation's information infrastructure. They provide books, encyclopedias and other resources for people of all ages and backgrounds. Providing access to electronic information is a natural extension of this role.

And librarians are there to help us use the Internet and make wise choices about the wealth of information available.

But according to the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, fewer than a third of America's public libraries can now offer direct public Internet access.

The main barrier? Most libraries, especially those in remote areas, can't afford the high cost of long distance and other telecommunications charges.

Relief is in sight but only if the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) acts promptly to ensure deep discounts on telecommunications charges.

The Telecommunications Act passed by Congress last year designates libraries and schools as universal providers eligible for such discounts on telecommunications rates. The FCC is expected to announce how large the discounts will be and to what services they will apply.

These discounts are desperately needed if our nation's libraries and schools are to get on with the urgent business of providing the public with online connections.

For the nation's most profitable industry, these discounts are a small investment in increased consumer exposure that can potentially add to their profits.

It's up to the FCC to turn Congress' good intentions into reality. Sixty percent of the jobs created by the year 2000 will require Americans to be computer literate.

Without significant discounts for schools and libraries, 21st century information technology will remain a science-fiction fantasy for millions of children and adults.

LeVar Burton, member
Nat'l. Commission on Libraries
and Information Science
Chicago, Ill.



**APPALACHIAN
REGIONAL
COMMISSION**

*A Proud Past,
A New Vision*

Office of the Federal Co-Chairman

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**Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary**

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APR 29 1997

April 28, 1997

The Honorable Susan Ness
Commissioner
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, N.W., Room 832
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Commissioner Ness:

The Federal Communications Commission's findings on Universal Service that will be released on May 8, 1997 will have a very significant impact on the 399 counties that are served by the Appalachian Regional Commission [ARC]. The ARC serves parts of 12 states from New York to Mississippi, and all of West Virginia.

The ARC fully supports the FCC in its leadership role in encouraging an environment of competition between different service providers. The ARC believes that the FCC should provide a support subsidy system for toll-free access to the Internet for educational and telehealth users, and advocates a subsidy program that will provide rural areas with the opportunity to develop the state-of-the-art telecommunications services that are needed to ensure an educated, healthy, and ready to work population.

For more than 25 years the Appalachian Regional Commission has had an active interest in the role that telecommunications technology can play in helping move the Appalachian region into the nation's economic mainstream. Starting in 1972, the ARC partnered with NASA, the University of Kentucky, and the country of India to launch a satellite that would deliver educational programs to schools and communities across Appalachia. The ARC helped to finance all types of downlink facilities, including satellite dishes and microwave equipment, in order to distribute the educational programming throughout the region. The satellite was eventually re-positioned over India, where it provided similar educational services.

Since 1989 the ARC has funded more than 40 advanced full motion and compressed video and computer-based telecommunication networks that serve the educational, medical, government, and business sectors throughout the region. Many of these networks have been expanded several times over the past 8 years. Nearly all of these networks are utilizing fiber optic or T1 lines that cross LATAs. In most instances these networks have been set up utilizing "special rates" offered by the respective telephone companies that serve the region. These special rates in many cases are about to expire or have already expired. In one instance, the telephone rate increased nearly 4 ½ times the original "introductory" rate.

If similar significant rate increases occur, many users will simply turn off the equipment or disconnect from the network. When sites are disconnected, the entire community and its service area lose a valuable access to the Information Highway.

The ARC has supported the funding of these advanced telecommunication services because it feels that access to information is a critical element in a comprehensive economic development strategy for any community or organization. The ARC, as a Federal agency, has recognized and addressed the overall importance of the need for telecommunications services throughout the agency's Strategic Plan, which the Appalachian Governors and I unanimously adopted in 1996. The Commission believes that, unless the region is served by an affordable telecommunication system, Appalachia will be by-passed by the "Information Highway" just as the Interstate Highway System by-passed the region in the 1950's and 1960's. We believe that advanced telecommunication services are absolutely essential in building a sustainable economic base in a community.

As you know, the Appalachian region is comprised of many low and moderate income communities that are geographically isolated from major urban areas where there are numerous telecommunication services offered at affordable rates. The Appalachian region needs to have the same choices of bandwidths up to and including 1.54 Mbps necessary for the provision of telemedicine / telehealth care services, educational, governmental, and business sector uses that the more urban areas are already enjoying at this time.

If the rural Universal Service Rates are not comparable to urban service rates, the impact will be substantial and detrimental and will impair the Commission's--and the nation's--effort to give Appalachia a full seat at the table of American prosperity:

- rural areas will become less desirable places for businesses to operate from or locate in;
- many rural hospitals will cease to exist as the primary care site for communities, potentially resulting in a general decline in the overall health of a region and adversely affecting business recruiting activities;
- many doctors and other health care providers will not locate in rural areas unless they feel they can be supported by advanced telemedicine / telehealth services from the major urban areas;
- educational opportunities for traditional K-12 students will not be competitive with those in urban areas, impeding the effort to achieve the National Education Goals